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GENDER EQUALITY IN TOURISM INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY FROM MADABA, JORDAN

**MONTHER JAMHAWI¹, ABDULLA AL-SHORMAN^{2*}, ZAIN HAJAHJAH³,
YASMIN OKOUR³ AND MARWA ALKHALIDI⁴**

¹Department of City Planning and Design, Faculty of Architecture, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid, Jordan.

²Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan.

³Department of Urban Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Jordan.

⁴Department of Architecture, Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Authors MJ and AAS designed the study, wrote the protocol and interpreted the data. Authors ZH, YO and MA anchored the field study, gathered the initial data, performed preliminary data analysis and managed the literature searches and produced the initial draft. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The traditional values in many cultural localities may interfere with women participation in tourism industry and may play a pivotal role in producing and reproducing gender inequality. Gender equality is considered as one of the indicators for the socio-cultural sustainability in tourist sites. Hence, the status of women equality in one of the attraction sites in Jordan (Madaba) was evaluated using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The results show that the tourism sector provides limited access to women's employment and opportunities for creating self-employment in small and medium-sized income generating activities in the region of Madaba, thus creating few paths towards the elimination of poverty of women in particular and local communities in general in the study area. Inequality was very evident even in other industries due to the burden of cultural values and beliefs. This study recommends further collaboration of all stakeholders – national and local governmental authorities and non-governmental bodies, industry, local communities, and community based tourism initiatives to increase women's participation in tourism industry and to alleviate inequality.

Keywords: Jordan; Madaba; women; tourism; inequality; empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender is an integral part in one's identity referring to the social, cultural and psychological aspects in life but 'sex' refers to the biological aspects of being male or female. Put in other words, sex is fixed and based in nature while gender is fluid and based in culture [1]. Such definition of gender implies differences

among the various cultures depending on the values, beliefs and behavioral expectations that are at the same time changeable over time [2]. One could actually argue that over the last decades gender has emerged as a crosscutting issue in international development. Gender in tourism industry, in particular, is viewed as being constructed, legitimated, reproduced and reworked [3], which may affect the

*Corresponding author: Email: alshorman@yu.edu.jo;

identities of tourists, locals and employees as well as gender identity [4]. Tourism is a highly gendered industry [5], where women's participation is obvious but culturally variable. [6] noted that men and women are generally unequally impacted by tourism because of the collective understanding of the social construction of gender [7-11]. However, 'equality of opportunity' may contribute greatly to the sustainable development and women empowerment [12] not as proposed by the feminist approach which stresses on liberal women development [13].

In Jordan, there is an inherent conflict between traditional values and the obligation of private enterprise, such as tourism, which places enormous pressures on women, of course at the expense of social sustainability and equality. The role of women in Jordan, as an Arab country, has been pictured as frail and dominated by men relatives, a cultural phenomenon which stems primarily from the traditional and religious laws. This phenomenon keeps women relatively far from entering the tourism industry [14]. Greater equality, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), is an essential component of a sustainable tourism industry because women make almost half of the potential workforce. In addition, women's empowerment in tourism increases their economic opportunities so they can attain equality and dignity [2]. [15], for example, found that tourism industry in Jordan is male-dominated, particularly in the upper echelons of management.

In 2012, women participation rate in the labor force in Jordan was 15.3% [16], which placed Jordan in the fifth lowest female participation rate worldwide [17]. The majority of women were employed in the education and health sectors. Nevertheless, there is a growing trend toward more women participation in tourism industry in Jordan; Table 1 below shows the participation rates in the labor force in Jordan for the years 1990-2011. The number of women in the labor force had increased from 1990 to 2011. Consequently, this study comes to examine the continuation of such a trend in Jordan taking the attraction site of Madaba as a case study to assess if there is a noticeable improvement in the gender equality in the tourism sector in Jordan.

Labor force participation rate is the proportion of the population ages 15 and older that is economically active, i.e. all people who supply labor for the production of goods and services during a specified period [17].

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the trend gender equality in the tourism sector in one of the

major attraction sites in Jordan (the city of Madaba). Women have long been considered as effective in societies' development as their empowerment will have booster economic development and sustainability. The other objective of the study is to put the job segregation and inequality in the tourism sector in Jordan in a cultural context. This may enable decision makers in the industry to guide their future management plans to incorporated more women and to rule out the restrictions and detentions of culture that impinged women from entering the tourism sector.

1.2 Study Area

Madaba city is located in the mid-southern region of Jordan about 30 kilometers from Amman, with a population number of about 130,000, and an area of 2,008 km². Madaba has a promising future in the tourism sector, particularly in generating a considerable source of foreign currency, the infrastructure development, and opportunities for new management and educational experience, which all contribute positively to the social and economic development of the city. The city of Madaba is characterized by its urban morphology that attracts tourists. Its geographical location in the mid-southern region enables it to be accessible from different directions and close to other popular tourism destinations such as Mount Nebo, Mukawir, Hammamat Main, Um Al-Rasas, and the Dead Sea. Historically, Madaba was the cradle of many civilizations; Moabite, Nabatean, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic. Its heritage is dated to at least 4500 B.C. It flourished as a city during Moabite and Ammonites times (ca. 800 B.C) and the Hellenistic periods (ca. 300 B.C.).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study relied on structured questionnaires that were distributed over the employees of 25 tourism-related agencies and institutions in the study area (city of Madaba). Interviews with families and individuals (women and men) were also conducted to extract information about tourism in a socio-cultural context to draw a clear picture about gender and how it is constructed in the study area. The study utilizes 6 indicators of gender equality: Number of women and men working in the cultural and environmental heritage sector, employment hierarchy, education level, wages, rate of employment, and the institutional mechanism that were adopted to empower women. The process of data collection was performed on national (Jordan Census Department) and area of study levels (questionnaires and interviews). The collected data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS (v. 18).

Table 1. Participation rates in the labor force in Jordan, 1990-2011

Year	Total labor force	Women in the labor force (% of total labor force)	Women's labor participation rate (% of female population Aged 15+)	Men's labor participation rate (% of male population aged 15+)
1990	663,272	10.7	8.9	65.3
1991	777,486	10.9	9.3	67.0
1992	842,023	11.6	10.0	66.6
1993	917,163	12.1	10.6	67.5
1994	988,526	12.6	11.2	68.1
1995	1,045,166	13.1	11.8	68.5
1996	1,089,579	13.3	12.0	68.7
1997	1,129,223	13.6	12.2	68.7
1998	1,164,876	13.7	12.2	68.7
1999	1,183,243	13.9	12.3	68.4
2000	1,212,988	14.2	12.5	68.2
2001	1,244,332	14.0	12.2	68.4
2002	1,267,107	14.9	12.8	67.1
2003	1,282,239	14.0	11.8	66.9
2004	1,307,927	13.0	10.8	67.0
2005	1,364,267	14.5	12.1	66.9
2006	1,393,811	15.0	12.4	65.9
2007	1,481,499	17.7	15.0	66.0
2008	1,517,472	17.3	14.6	65.8
2009	1,591,950	18.0	15.4	66.6
2010	1,613,065	18.2	15.3	65.4
2011	1,677,855	18.4	15.6	65.9
Average	1,216,140	14.30	12.32	67.16



Fig. 1. Jordan map (Madaba location)

3. RESULTS

The collected data from the years 2012 , 2013, and 2014 show that the number of women working in the tourism industry in Madaba area is 249 out of 1214 accounting for 20%. The majority fall under the age group between 30-39 (43%), which reflects the same distribution on the national level (Figs. 2 and 3).

Unemployed women in Madaba believe that there is no work available or either claimed that they cannot find a suitable job. Considering cultural and environmental disciplines at the Jordanian universities, the results show that for the years 2011-2014 female university graduates preferred geology and environmental sciences then history as a major of specialization but not tourism, which is almost similar to male intentions (Fig. 4).

The majority of women working in tourism industry in Madaba either hold a high school or a bachelor degree as opposed to men where most of them do not hold any degree as seen in Fig. 5 below.

In tourism industry, the job position of women is mainly limited to administrative tasks, which means that outdoor tourism jobs are almost exclusive to males.

The years of experience is also affected by gender as males tend to have more experience than women.

The wages at the area of Madaba show a clear disparity between men and women. For example, women receive lower wages at a lower salary class (from 111-221 Euros) but higher wages at higher wages class for men (333-554 Euros) as shown in Figs. 5 and 6, which is actually the same all over the country.

The employment rate at the study area is 20% for females for the years 2012 and 2013. It is, however, a little bit lower on the national level (17%).

4. DISCUSSION

Even with equal education opportunities in Jordan, women participation in the tourism industry in Madaba area is similar to that across the country, which is below that of men. Currently, there is a

general trend in the region of Madaba toward hiring educated women in tourism industry, opposed to the case of men where most of them are not educated. This is actually explained by the type of job women usually get in such industry; women prefer to get administrative jobs in the tourism industry to avoid being outside. It is a conscious intention to protect themselves from *outsiders* as imposed by their families and culture as a whole.

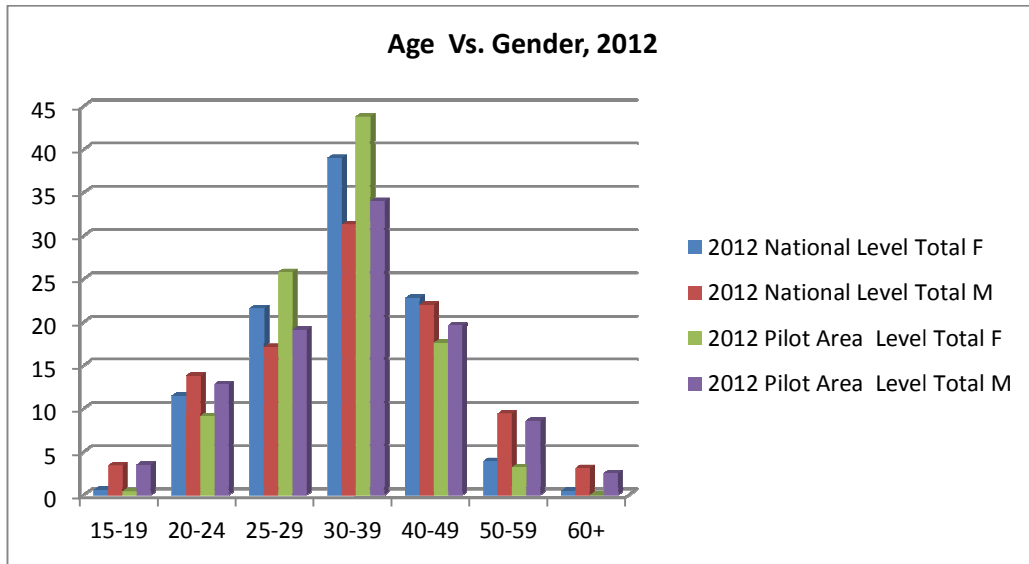


Fig. 2. Age vs. gender in Madaba area compared to the national level for the year 2012

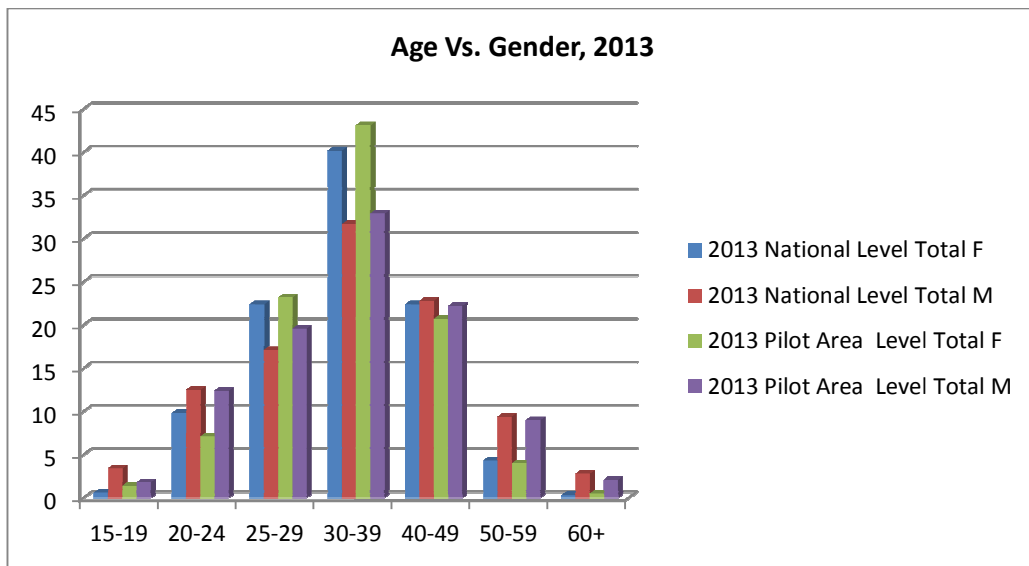


Fig. 3. Age vs. gender in Madaba area compared to the national level for the year 2013

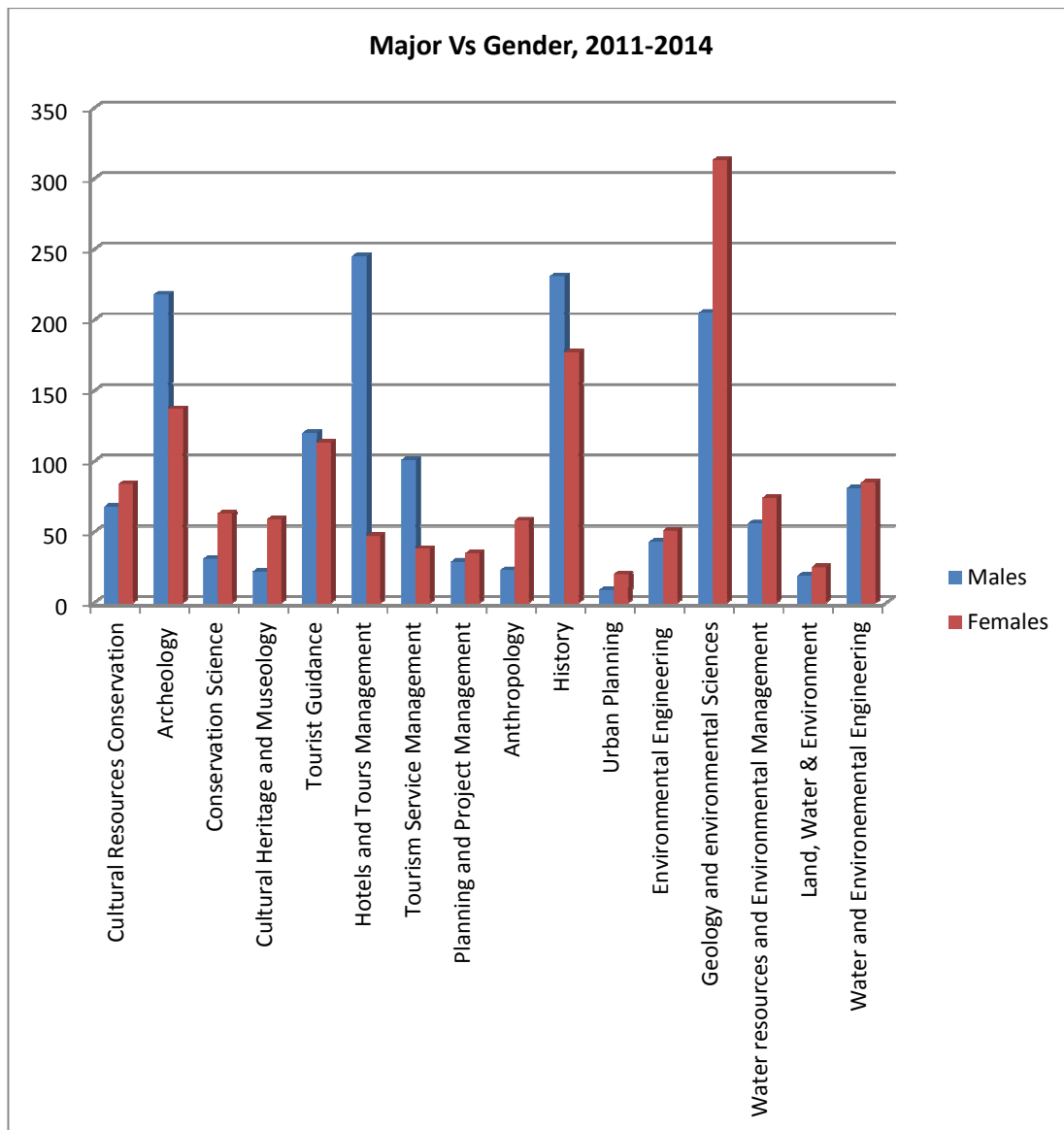


Fig. 4. University major of women at Madaba region compared to men (2011-2014)

In fact, gender is socially constructed where people perceive gender in a way that is socially woven in their unconscious minds. Accordingly, the sum of the behaviors in the society has to be performed parallel to its culture regulations. For example, women are not socially able to live on their own without the approval of their parents, and there are constraints to their mobility primarily arising from the social norms. The results would be an extra burden on women especially in this type of jobs, where women have to be exposed to the public more and deal with *outsiders* more. This reinforces the traditional division the general tendency to assert the primacy of the public world: The socio-political and economic sphere dominated by men and

to denigrate the private world: The familial sphere dominated by women [18]. According to [19], working in tourism is too liberal for Jordanian women, requires long hours of being outside, and has difficulties combining work and family life which is not suitable for them. According to her, the sum of the social status, traditions, and religion play a role in negative mindset towards tourism.

Abu [20] too examines how the segregation of sex had traditionally played a critical role in the structure of Islamic cities. The main point feminists have stressed about gender inequality is that it is not an individual matter, but is deeply ingrained in the

structure of societies. Gender inequality is built into the organization of marriage and families, work and the economy, politics, religions, the arts and other cultural productions, and the very language we speak [21].

Previous studies rationalized job segregation in tourism to the culture of tourism [22-24,8]. Tourism is a powerful cultural ground and process that shapes and is shaped by gendered representations of places, people, nations and cultures [25]. Based on a

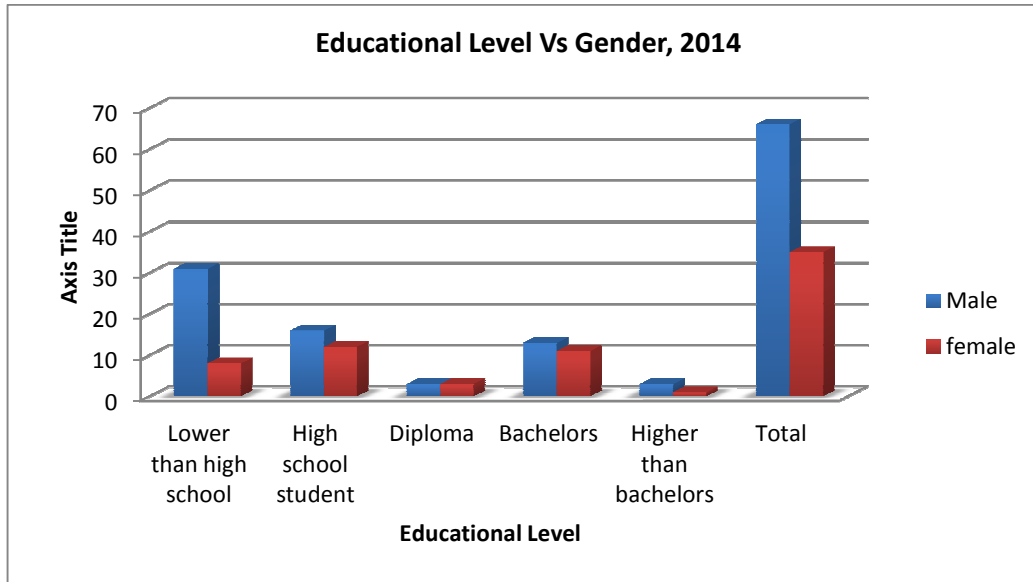


Fig. 5. Gender and education level in the area of Madaba

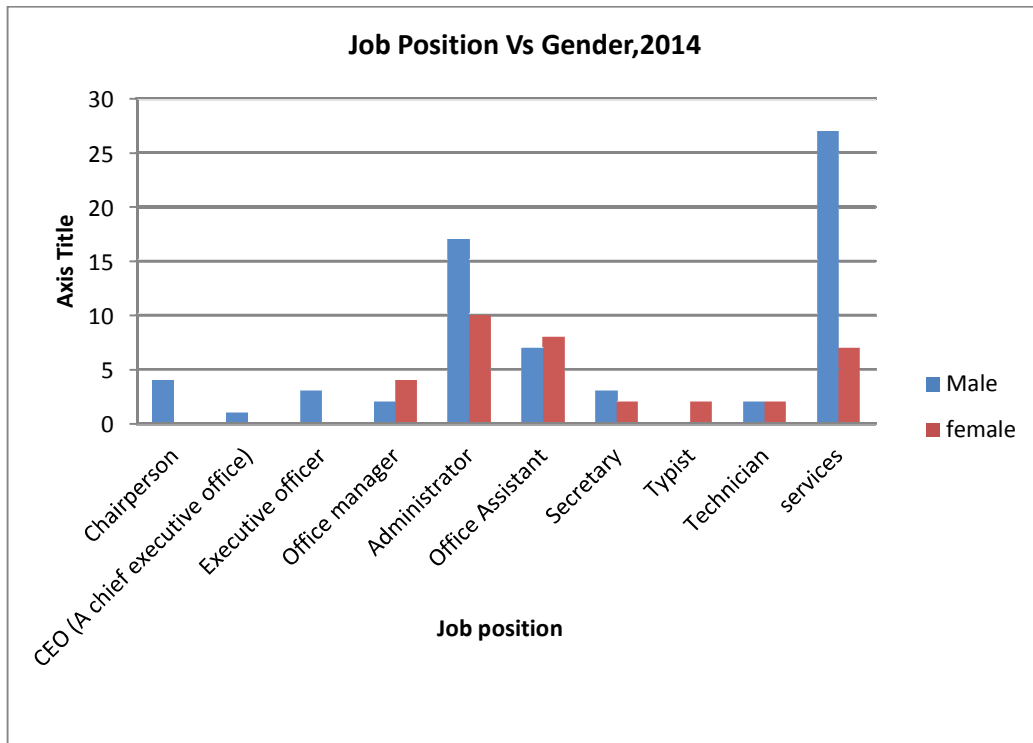


Fig. 6. Job position in Madaba region by sex

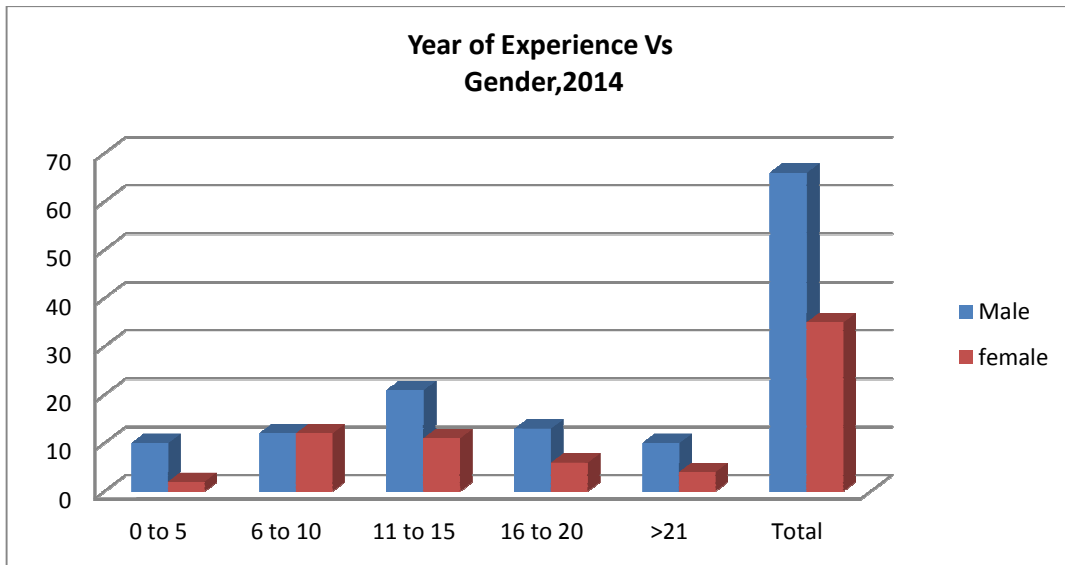


Fig. 7. The years of experience in Madaba region by sex

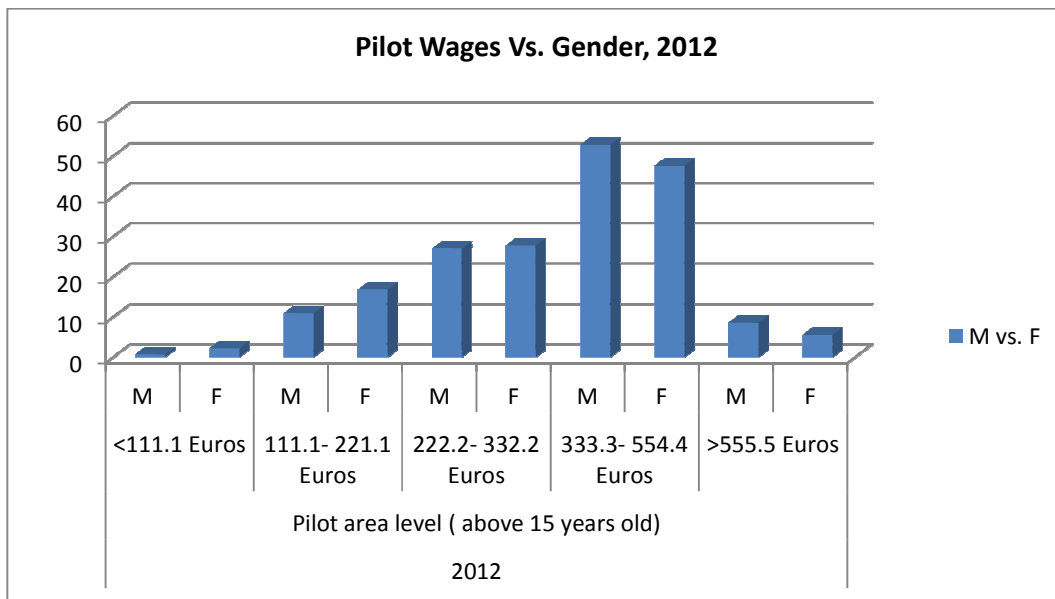


Fig. 8. Wages vs. gender in the study area for the year 2012

poststructural and colonialist discourse approach [26,27], tourism in Jordan neither markets nor promotes places and people for consumption; something that is culturally constructed. Consequently, this may work as a machine for selecting certain types of tourists and meeting their demands. This process, in turn, yields further gender disparity in employment at the tourism sector.

Based on the above results, some conclusion about women's positioning in tourism industry in terms of hierarchical levels can be drawn. It appears very

clear that the situation in the tourism industry resembles the one in the labor markets in general. As in many other sectors, there is a significant horizontal and vertical gender segregation of the labor market in tourism in Jordan. Horizontally, women and men are placed in different occupations - women are generally being indoors whereas men are being employed outdoors. Vertically, the typical "gender pyramid" is prevalent in the tourism sector - lower levels and occupations with few career development opportunities are dominated by women and key managerial positions are dominated by men.

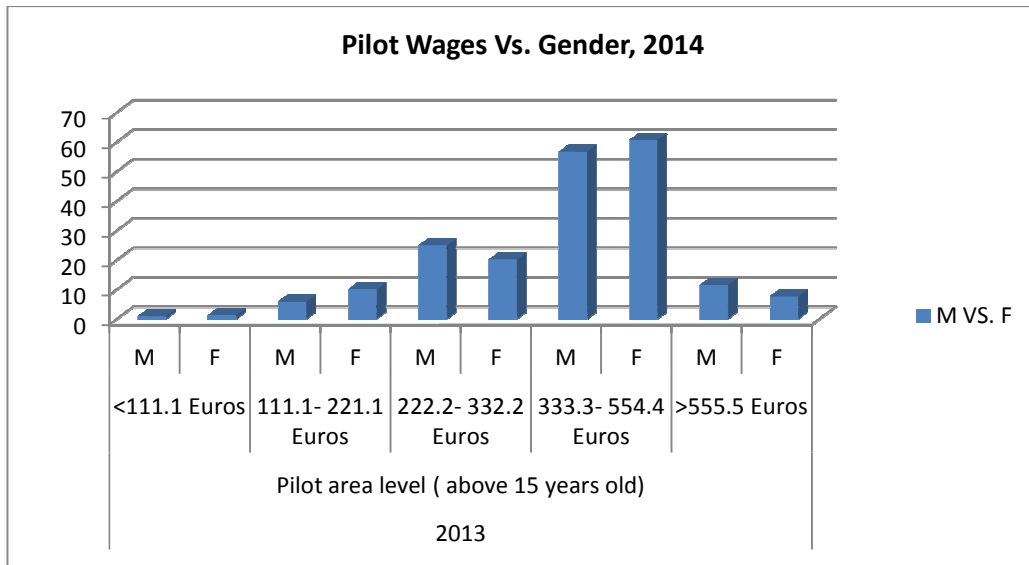


Fig. 9. Wages vs. gender in the study area for the year 2014

There are many inter-twined factors which keep gender segregation in the labor market in Madaba region and generally in the whole country. Among them are gender stereotyping (as culturally imposed), traditional gender roles and gender identity. Women are viewed as more appropriate for specific occupations and they see themselves as more suitable for such occupations. In addition, traditional gender roles in the Arab culture in general assign to women the main responsibilities for raising children and doing household work. Thus, women are often forced to choose modest labor, part-time or even seasonal employment but with a very high turnover too.

In Jordan, the image about the transformation from women’s social reproduction work to reproductive work is still static especially in rural areas. This image was supported by the International Labor Organization report in 2001, which stated that gender disparity in tourism in poor countries is attributed mainly to lower social status of women. The results of a study by Assaf [28], the current social and economic status of women in Jordan is already behind that of men, which brings challenges to women in the tourism sector. The results are in contradiction with those of a study by Itani [29] which negated the need for social change among Arab women, but proposed a rising awareness and understanding of their work to make them more acceptable in their societies.

The constitution of Jordan in its article (6)¹ stressed on the equal opportunities for both men and women. For example jobs’ criteria for selection do not rely on

gender and thus leadership opportunities by law are not limited to men. Moreover, the government cabinet consortium in Jordan always pays high attention to include sufficient number of women. Therefore, there is an urgent need to change in the social and cultural structures of gender inequality to achieve gender balance and thus equal participation of women in the tourism industry [30].

5. CONCLUSIONS

Although tourism in Jordan is a still-growing industry, it has demonstrated its potential for creating jobs and encouraging income-generating activities to benefit local communities in the nationally widespread destination areas, such as Madaba. Unfortunately, the tourism sector provides limited access to women’s employment and opportunities for creating self-employment in small and medium-sized income generating activities in the region of Madaba, thus creating few paths towards the elimination of poverty of women and local communities in the study area. However, there are a number of conditions under which this potential can be used more effectively. This requires a more positive collaboration of all stakeholders – national and local governmental authorities and non-governmental bodies, industry, local communities, and community based tourism initiatives. However, the tourism industry in Madaba region seems to be a particularly good "candidate" for engaging in efforts towards the advancement of women. Due to its growing size, its rapid growth and its varied nature (i.e.; religious tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, etc.), the tourism industry in this particular region has a giant flexibility. This, in turn,

¹ The Constitution of The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (1952)

can enable the industry to develop key initiatives for the advancement of women so that other industries can benefit from initiatives and strategies in the tourism sector as models for their own development. The reasonable percentage of women in the tourism workforce in Madaba provides a necessary fundament for the further advancement of women, which is an already established critical mass. Women equality in tourism industry in Madaba necessitates a change in the traditional cultural and religious values and practices that perpetrate gender inequalities.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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